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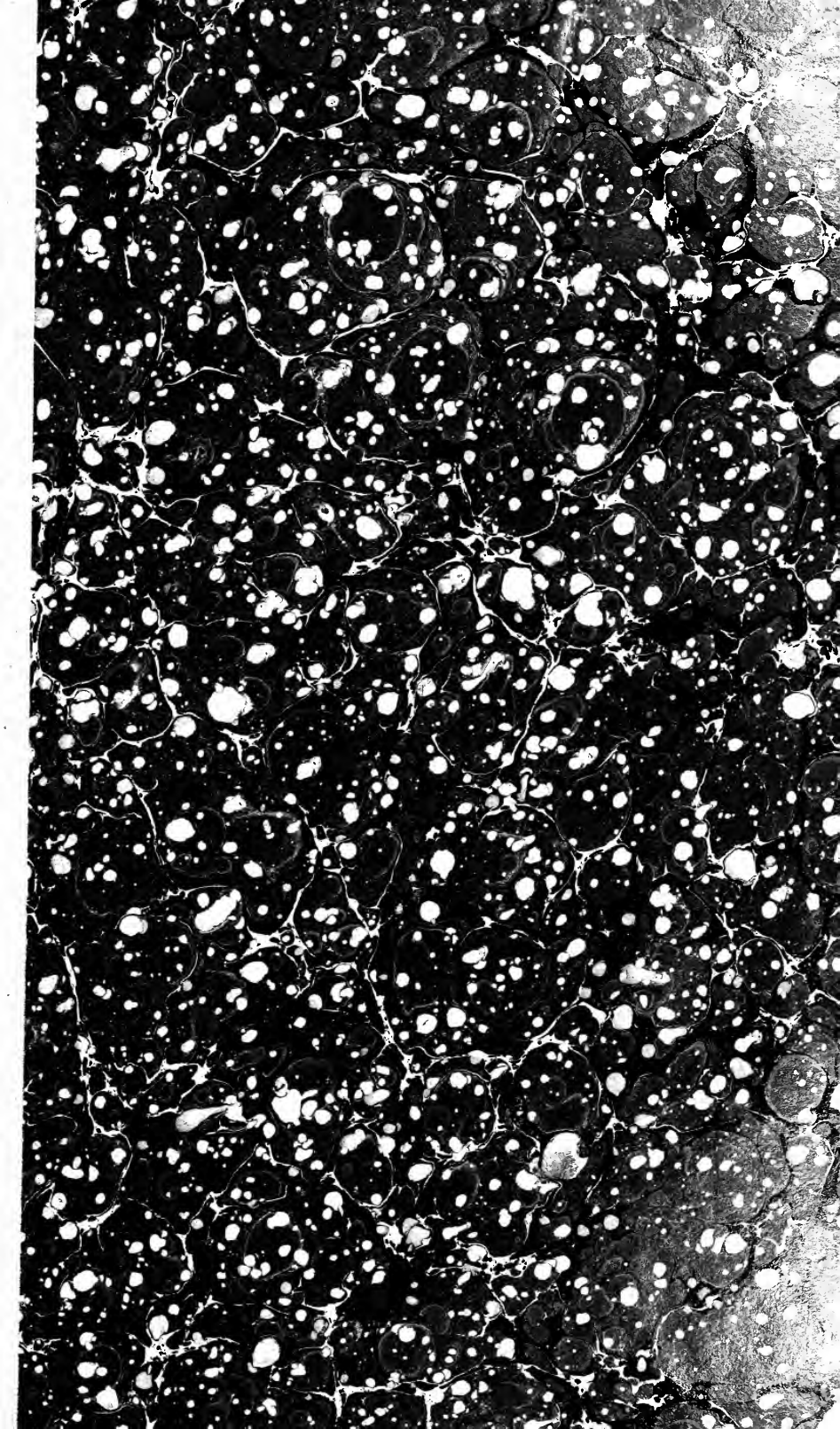
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TRADITIONS

CONCERNING THE

Origin of the American Munsons



Gathered and Digested

BY

MYRON A. MUNSON

NEW HAVEN:

THE TUTTLE, MOREHOUSE & TAYLOR PRESS

1897

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*Errors like straws upon the surface flow ;
He who would search for pearls must dive below.*

—DRYDEN.

*Not a truth has to art or to science been given,
But brows have ached for it.*

—BARON LYTTON.

TRADITIONS CONCERNING THE ORIGIN OF THE AMERICAN MUNSONS.

By MYRON A. MUNSON.

There have come to me about forty family traditions in respect to the Munson or Munsons who originally immigrated to this country. We may review the traditions under four heads.

I. Whence did the Family come, and of what nationality were they?

One tradition speaks of a German origin : Baron von Munson was sent as an ambassador to England, and subsequently settled in Devonshire ; a son of this family ran away upon the sea, and eventually settled in America. This tale appears to be a pure fiction.

Two traditions speak of a French origin : one assigns to the Frenchman an English wife ; the other represents that brothers emigrate to England and thence to this country. Neither story appears to have any basis whatever.

Various traditions, some fourteen of them, speak of an English origin : there were brothers from England, is the saying of six ; brothers from the North of England, says one ; brothers from London, says another ; brothers who belonged to the respectable yeoman class in England, says another ; young men by the name of Munson from England ; Joseph^s and brother from England ; Samuel^s and, again, Levi^s from England ; Joseph K.^o and brother from England. The testimony of these traditions is of slight value. A North of England origin and a London origin are discordant. That Joseph K.^o, and Samuel^s, and Lieut. Levi^s, were natives of England, is discredited by the known fact that they were born here, as were three or four generations of their ancestors.

That English-speaking colonists bearing English names were of English origin, is what would be conjectured or assumed by persons making conjectures and assumptions : accordingly, un-
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ported by extra-traditional evidence, these traditions have slight value as testimony. Doubtless the Munsons are English; of course they are English; why not? The ease with which one forms this guess, or adopts this assumption, eliminates from the traditions any valuable significance which they might otherwise have.

Twelve traditions ascribe to the Family a Welsh origin or Welsh connection of some sort; and these traditions are found among the descendants of at least five of the grandsons of the Pioneer, namely, Samuel, Thomas, Theophilus, Joseph and Caleb; the descendants of John and Stephen have not reported them. Robert M. Hartley, who married Catharine, daughter of Reuben⁶, a member of *Clan William*, states in an autograph that Reuben⁶ "was of a respectable family of Welsh descent." Owen E. Case remembers that his mother, Laura⁸, of *Clan Waitstill*, said that her ancestors came from Wales. The writer's grandfather, Daniel⁷, of *Clan Obadiah*, testified that his first ancestor in this country was a Welshman. Rev. Frederick of the same Clan, observes: "My grandfather [Ephraim⁶] used to say that we were Welsh." And again Frederick says: "The earliest known ancestor of the Munson Family in this country was an immigrant from Wales." Alfred⁷ (of another Clan) who was well acquainted with Ephraim⁶, also reported him as saying that our ancestors came over from Wales. Henry⁷, of Muskingum, Ohio, remarked to me—"My father [Frederick A.⁶, of *Clan Theophilus*] used to say he was partly Welsh." Charles F.⁸, a native of Canada, writes: "The tradition our brother Jared, of Collingwood, Ont., received from father [Warren⁷, of *Clan Ephraim*] was that brothers named Munson came from Wales." Charles F. elsewhere informs us that his mother reported his father as saying that his Family was from Wales. Several traditions are contributed by *Clan Moses*, to the same effect. Thus, Norman E. Miller, of Vermont: "Tradition says the Munsons were Welsh." Frederic⁷, of New York: "We Munsons are descended from brothers who came from Wales." The family of Frederick T.⁷ report that his father Thomas⁶ used to say that his ancestry came over from Wales. And Mrs. Mary E. Henderson, of Ohio, also states that her first American ancestor emigrated from Wales.

Now as no one would dream of ascribing to a family of English speech and name, any connection with Wales, traditions affirming such a connection, converging from five of the seven great groups

of Munsons, are most significant, and indicate incontestably that our ancestry had some connection with the little land whose leading products are slate and consonants. Doubtless, however, we are of English nationality, a branch of the ancient Lincolnshire family, the connection with Wales being merely residential. Yet, our Pioneer may have married in Wales.

II. *What was the number of Munsons who immigrated?*

Angeline^a Munson reported the family tradition that all our Munsons sprang originally from eight brothers living in or near New Haven, Conn. This view is probably a genuine inheritance, and essentially authentic as far as it goes, but extending only to the grandsons of the Pioneer; there were eight of these who lived to maturity and had families. Mrs. Mary E. Henderson has the tradition that her great-grandfather or great-great-grandfather^a emigrated with seven sons, from whom sprang all the Munsons in this country. This also appears to be a genuine inheritance, and in main features correct, though it does not reach the beginning. These seven sons are the grandsons of the Pioneer, those seven which became heads of the great branches of the Family. (One of the eight families mentioned a moment ago became extinct presently.) The same tradition comes from another part of the same Clan, except that the father of the seven sons is denominated doctor. This title may have been misappropriated to the Pioneer in consequence of the overshadowing preëminence of old Doctor Eneas^b Munson.

Two traditions speak of three *Munsons* as having emigrated, and ten speak of three *Munson brothers*. On examining these twelve traditions, one is impressed with the idea that they are devoid of validity. Two of them settle the three emigrants in "Connecticut," and seven settle them in a dozen places, no two agreeing. For some occult reason, the conjectural number of migrating brothers is quite commonly three. There is interesting peculiarity in a tradition furnished by Ezra^a, of Illinois: Three young men by the name of Munson came from England in the seventeenth century; one dièd; two married and raised large families; one family was composed of girls, the other of boys; the latter were the ancestors of the people named Munson. Our researches find nothing in support of this story.

Seven traditions mention two brothers as migrating; but in two cases, the Munsons migrating are of the sixth generation,

in another of the fourth, in another of the third ; and no one of the seven appears to be of any consequence. One of them, probably two of them, were invented to account for the New Haven and the Wallingford divisions of the Family, which originated, as we know, in the second and third generations. Four traditions speak of one immigrant as the source of our Family : while this view is supported by investigation, the traditions are invalid, as one of them goes only to the second generation, one to the third, one to the fourth, and the other to the fifth.

Tradition, therefore, sheds no light on the question—How many Munsons originally immigrated? Research discovers among the primitive colonists only one man named Munson. It should be observed, however, that as early as 1644, the marriage of a woman, Anne Munson, occurred at Springfield, Mass.

III. *What was the period of the first Munson migration?*

We have already touched this question incidentally. Four writers mention their own ancestry as immigrating, without indicating whether the persons named were understood to be the ancestors of us all ; but two of these migrations were in the sixth generation, viz., Joseph K.^a and the brothers David^a and Isaac^a, and two were in the fifth, viz., Samuel^b and Lieut. Levi.^b Of the general traditions, one carries the migration back to the Landing of the Pilgrims or soon after that event, another to “the first expedition after the Mayflower,” and a third to a date soon after the Pilgrims landed. We disbelieve immediately that these are primitive traditions ; they are traditionary conjectures, mediæval imaginings,—or they may be modern guesses.

One mixed tradition locates the migration in the fifth generation. Three or four others locate it in the fourth generation, making Obadiah^c, Daniel^c, and Caleb^c, respectively, the source of the Family. Three traditions locate the coming-over in the third generation ; of course the third generation is not the first, as they supposed. Two or three others locate the removal of the Family in the second generation apparently, one of them dating it about the time of the Wallingford settlement ; while this period is early, it is too late.

No genuine tradition concerning the time of the migration goes back far enough ; each goes back as far as its memory can reach, but never to the beginning.

IV. *Where, according to the traditions, did the Family first settle ?*

Two brothers in Connecticut ; three brothers in Connecticut, according to two traditions ; one pioneer near the mouth of Connecticut River ; eight brothers settled in or near New Haven ; of three brothers, one settled in Connecticut, one went south, and one to Canada ; of three brothers, one settled in Massachusetts, one in Rhode Island, and one in Connecticut ; of three brothers, two settled in New Haven, and the other went to New Hampshire ; of three brothers, one settled in New Haven, one on Long Island, and the third in Vermont ; of three Munsons, one settled in Boston, one in New Haven, and one on Long Island ; of three brothers, one settled in Wallingford, one in Massachusetts, and one in Rhode Island ; of two brothers, one settled in New Haven, and the other in Wallingford, according to two distinct traditions.

Some of these traditional settlements appear to be recklessly fictitious ; some of them relate to descendants of the original settler ; if any are genuine and authentic, research has hitherto failed to discover and verify the fact. There is no real evidence that in the earliest time any male Munson settled in Wallingford, or Boston, or Massachusetts, or Vermont, or Canada, or Rhode Island, or the South.

Twenty-seven years after **Thomas Munson** appears in Hartford, Richard Munson is found in Portsmouth, New Hampshire ; it has been, and is, my firm belief that the Munson name came to that settlement by a separate migration.

As to Long Island, one John Munson was dwelling in Brook-Haven, March 1, 17¹²/₁₃ ; before May 20, 1715, he had removed to Derby, Conn. His wife was Hannah. Their son John, born April 24, 1690, married Elizabeth.* This second John removed to New Concord, in the County of Albany, and Province of New York, where he was living Dec. 25, 1770. I can give no account of the origin of John Munson of Brook-Haven, Long Island.

The mention of Massachusetts a moment ago may be qualified in this way : It is probable that our Pioneer, Thomas Munson, sojourned for an uncertain time in some old Massachusetts-Bay settlement before migrating to the Connecticut River.

Perhaps in the future more light upon some of these traditional settlements may break forth from some quarter. I do not feel sanguine in respect to any unless it be that of Long Island.

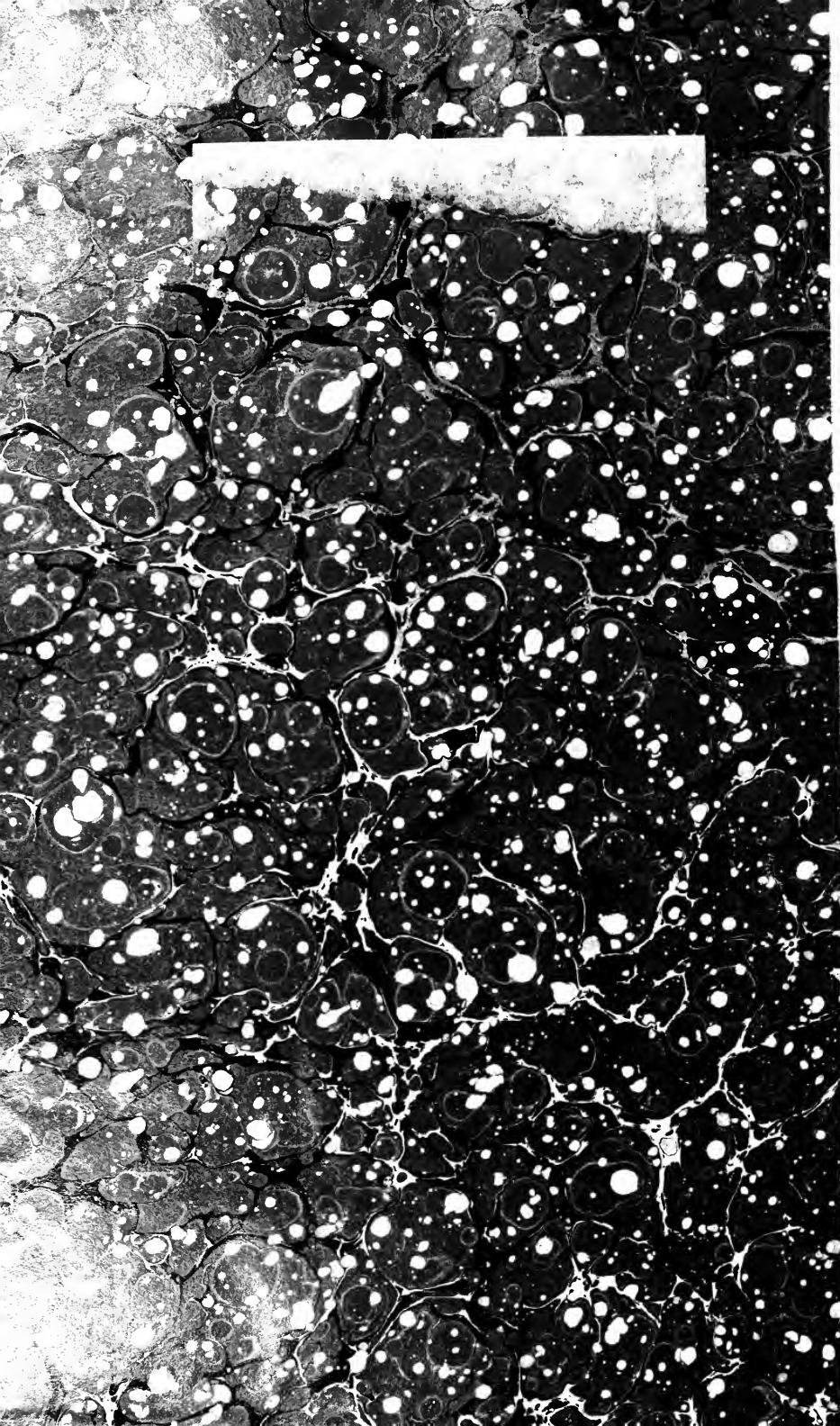
* Hannah, daughter of John and Elizabeth, was born March 7, 1721 and married Stephen Pierson ; Daniel, a son of John and Elizabeth, died at Fort Edward Aug. 2, 1756.

We have completed our survey of the traditions collected in regard to the origin of our Family. Its chief value as a whole resides in its illustration of the untrustworthiness of ancient traditions. Its one independent contribution to knowledge is the affirmation that our ancestry had some significant connection with Wales; we count this a very valuable item. Its mention of Family settlements, though having a random look, hints at possibilities which it would be better not to dismiss slightly; one or another suggestion may afford a clue to some lost event of Family history which would enlighten and gratify us exceedingly.



Publications.

- The Munson Record, . . . Two volumes, royal 8vo, pp. 1267
- The Life, Character and Public Services of Captain Thomas
Munson, pp. 46
- Proceedings of the First Munson Reunion, Aug. 1887, . . pp. 88
- Proceedings of the Second Munson Reunion, Aug. 1896, . . pp. 43



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